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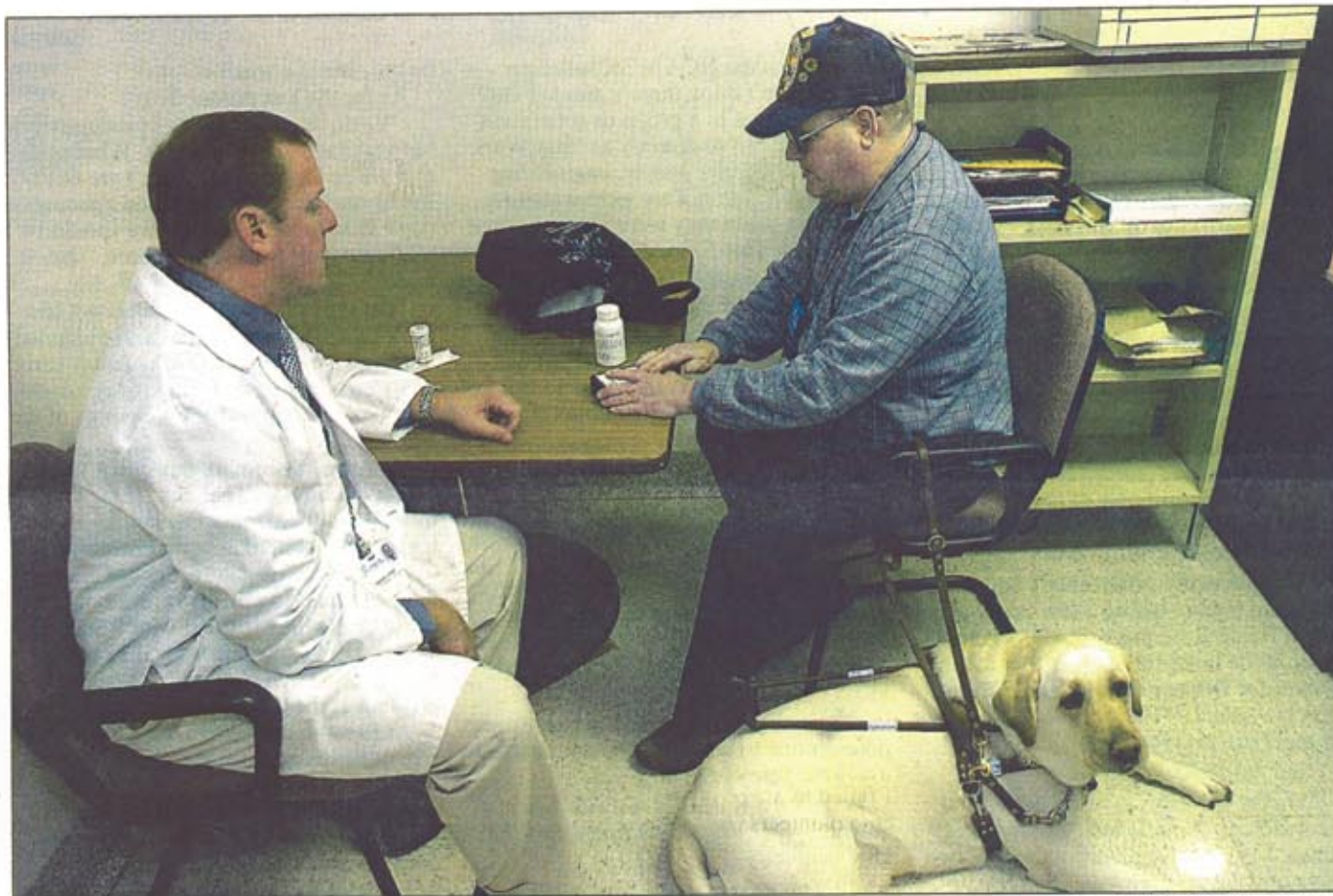
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Eyes on Safety



John Berry / Staff photographer

STEPHEN LEWIS, of Homer, a pharmacy program manager at the Syracuse VA Medical Center, teaches **William Irwin**, of Mexico — with his guide dog, **Rusty** — how to use **ScripTalk**

Wednesday. The device read labels to patients. "It also gives back one little piece of independence the veterans lost when their vision was lost," said a hospital official.

ScripTalk reads prescription labels to people

By **James T. Mulder**
Staff writer

Karl Coe's vision is so poor he cannot read the labels on his prescription drug containers.

His wife used to keep track of the 23 pills he takes daily.

Now the Liverpool man does that himself with the help of a pocket-sized device that scans his prescription bottle then tells him all the information on the label. He's one of the first patients of the VA Medical Center in Syracuse to use the high-tech **ScripTalk** readers being offered to visually impaired veterans nationwide by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This thing will give me more responsibility and help my wife out," Coe said.

The Syracuse VA is the first VA facility in Upstate New York to introduce the technology.

The VA hopes the device reduces medication errors among veterans who are legally blind or have some other disability that prevents them from reading prescription labels, according to Marylou Mend-



John Berry / Staff photographer

A SCRIPTALK device reads a microchip to turn a medication's label into an audio message.

ez, visual impairment services coordinator at the Syracuse VA. The Syracuse VA serves more than 300 legally blind veterans.

"It also gives back one little piece of independence the veterans lost when their vision was lost," Mendez said.

ScripTalk can read only prescription labels that contain microchips storing all the information that is converted by the device into spoken words. Those labels

are printed and programmed in the VA's pharmacy computer system. A prescription from a non-VA retail pharmacy would not work in the device.

The VA pays \$275 for each rechargeable reader veterans use in their homes. Each label costs \$1.75. The label printers cost \$1,700. The system is made by **En-Vision America**, a company in Normal, Ill.

ScripTalk announces the name of the patient, the name of the drug, dosage, instructions and warnings, the doctor's name and phone number and the number of refills left. The technology is not available to the public.

"Some of the large chains are trying to adapt their labeling by using larger fonts to enhance readability," said Stephen L. Lewis, the VA's outpatient care pharmacy manager. "But the bottom line is you have some patients who cannot see. They are going to have to get to this type of technology."

En-Vision hopes to get the system in retail pharmacies.

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